



Ministry of Gender, Youth
and Child Development

National Gender Policy -
What does it mean for
the people of T&T?

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL GENDER POLICY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

1. *What is 'gender'?*

The term '*gender*' has been misunderstood all over the world, including here in Trinidad and Tobago. What may help to ease the confusion about '*gender*' is to better understand what it means and how it affects each of us – every man and woman, boy and girl in the society.

We often confuse '*gender*' with '*sex*', and that is perhaps where most of the misunderstanding stems.

So what is '*gender*', and how is it different from '*sex*'?

Sex refers to our biological reproductive system. Simply put, sex refers to whether we are male or female.

Gender on the other hand is more complex. If you think back to when you first became aware of sex and gender issues in your childhood and teens:

- **When did you discover that you were different from the opposite sex?**
What thoughts come to mind when you made this discovery?
- **What messages did you receive as a child about sex and gender –**
about the roles, qualities and expectations of girls and boys; and women and men?
- **Where did you get these ideas from –**
your parents and relatives, your teachers and friends at school, church leaders, media images and messages, calypsoes, etc.?
- **How did these early learnings shape your assumptions and values while growing up and as a young adult, about the '*rightful*' role and place of men and women in the society?**

So while our '*sex*' is biological, our '*gender*' is learned through our socialization process. If you look closely at Trinidad and Tobago society, you will find that the attitudes and behaviours, and the roles and responsibilities associated with being a man and woman are different depending on a person's ethnic background, socio-economic status, age group, and other social and cultural differences. These gender differences also vary from one society to another. And they change through time, as each of us can attest by comparing the different life chances of our great grandparents to our own generation.

The table below gives some examples of the attitudes and behaviours, expectations and values associated with men and boys, and women and girls:

MEN AND BOYS	WOMEN AND GIRLS
Children's rhyme: "Slugs and snails and puppy-dogs' tails"	Children's rhyme: "Sugar and spice and everything nice"
Tough and independent	Fragile and dependent
Brave, take risks	Careful
Control one's emotions, whether joy or sorrow	Express one's emotions openly, whether joy or sorrow
'Subject' – self at the centre	'Object' – others at the centre
Entitled to being served	Expected to serve others in the home and family, workplace, community, etc.
Expected to be task-oriented, to achieve	Expected to serve others, particularly in the roles of wife and mother
Valued for status and success	Valued for appearance
Compete, prove oneself, win	Provide support for men
Dominate, be in control	Obey, comply, concede
Protect, assume responsibility	Nurture, provide care

The idea that we belong to *'opposite'* sexes has affected the social relationships between women and men. Gender also refers to the different social roles assigned to men and women. These expectations have long prevented women from accessing equal opportunities to men.

2. *So gender is not just about women's rights?*

Exactly! Gender concerns men and women. Improving the status of women does not mean men will suffer. New attitudes can open up new possibilities for men and boys, and widen their options for personal fulfillment and for new ways of interacting with women and children. Imagine a world where the burden of providing for the family does not fall only on male shoulders. Or where all boys and girls are equal, and are free to live up to their greatest potential.

We are also beginning to see *'male gender gaps'* in Trinidad and Tobago and other countries around the world. For example, boys are dropping out of school at higher rates than girls, and young women now comprise approx. 75% of university entrants and graduates in Trinidad and Tobago. The national gender policy will address these and other gender gaps.

3. What are gender equality and equity?

Gender equality means that women and men have the right to enjoy equal status and have access to the same opportunities.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures often need to be taken to adjust the historical, social, economic and political imbalances that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field.

4. There has been much talk and debate in Trinidad and Tobago about the national gender policy. What is a gender policy?

A national gender policy is a framework put in place by the government to promote fairness and equality between men and women, and to ensure the development of the full potential of all men and boys, and women and girls in the society.

5. What does the national gender policy have to offer me?

Plenty, no matter who you are! A national gender policy is not for women only. The point of the policy is to achieve fairness for every single person, whether they are grandparents, fathers, teens, boys, girls, secretaries, construction workers, teachers, homemakers, or vendors.

Let's take education as an example.

Women who are illiterate have a lower chance of getting a job than illiterate men. On the other hand, certain social factors make boys less likely than girls to finish their secondary education. A national gender policy can help us develop an education system that caters to both boys and girls, and distributes educational resources equally.

At the end of the day, the national gender policy will affect how the state treats people, regardless of their gender and other differences.



6. *Why should we have a national gender policy?*

- To improve relations between women and men
- To improve the quality of life at all levels and in all sectors of society
- To influence state policy in all areas
- To facilitate legislative change

7. *What are the effects of not having a national gender policy?*

There are some key crises facing our society that have deep roots in our gender system. These include:

A CRISIS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Women and girls experience domestic violence, incest, rape and other forms of sexual violence and abuse. The figures are staggering. Homicides due to domestic violence are second only to gang murders. 940 reports of domestic violence were made to the Police in 2010, 68.2% of which were for “assault by beating”. The high incidence of rape, including gang rape is horrifying. In 2010, the Police received 215 reports of rape, 22 reports of incest, 158 reports of grievous sexual assaults, and 278 reports of sex with minor females 14-16 years of age (Crime and Problem Analysis Branch, TTPS). These figures are the tip of the iceberg, as many incidents of gender-based violence are not reported.
- Increasingly, men are experiencing domestic and other forms of gender-based violence. Young men are reporting being beaten by their girlfriends and partners, but they are ashamed to talk about it or report it to the police.

A CRISIS OF MANHOOD AND MASCULINITY

- In Trinidad and Tobago, we have a very high dropout rate of boys from the education system at all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. We know that some 75% of our university entrants and graduates are women.
- Significant numbers of young men in our society, too high for such a small population, are involved in illegal firearms, gang violence, drug trafficking, drug use, rape, kidnapping, murder and other forms of criminal activity.
- A significant number of adult males are experiencing alcoholism, lifestyle related diseases, unemployment, homelessness and depression, and men have a high rate of suicide.



A CRISIS OF CARE

- Despite high levels of education and employment, women are still the primary care-givers in the society. They are responsible for bearing and raising children; doing the lion's share of the housework; taking care of the sick, the aging and elderly, and the disabled; and managing many of our community-based organizations.
- Women need daycare centres, and private spaces at the workplace to breastfeed their babies, if we expect them to be effective members of the work force.
- In addition, men and boys need to share in the burden of housework, and the care of children, the extended family and the community.

A CRISIS OF SEXUALITY

- Despite being a highly sexualized society, as we see in our music, our dance, and our carnival and chutney festivals, we have not effectively addressed the issues in our policies and programmes – even when we are faced with high levels of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/ AIDS, and so on.

8. *How is the national gender policy relevant to the values that make us proud to be Trinbagonians?*

Our iconic national anthem affirms that our nation was “forged from the love of liberty”. It pledges that “side by side we stand”, and that “every creed and race finds an equal place”.

As a nation and as a people, we are a nurturing society. We are our brother's and sister's keeper. Our culture is warm, embracing and inclusive. We come together in times of national pride, cry for another's loss, hug strangers in jubilation at a cricket match, and share our meals with our neighbours.

Our history has been one of struggle against various forms of prejudice and discrimination. We protest unfairness, inequality and injustice for ourselves and for others without apology. We fought slavery and indentureship, systems of oppression based on racial inequality. We fought for the rights of workers against exploitative economic systems based on class inequality.

The national gender policy will help us take another step forward, and dismantle all forms of gender inequality.

9. *What are the linkages between the national gender policy and the seven interconnected Pillars of Development?*

PILLAR ONE –

We need everyone and all can contribute

The first pillar of development calls for an inclusive approach to democracy and governance. It also directly links with the goals of gender equality and equity by increasing women and men's access to and participation in the process of national development.

PILLAR TWO –

Poverty eradication and social justice

Poverty is gendered. Globally, 70% of the poor are women, due to their burden of responsibility in the home and family, and their unequal access to education, training, employment opportunities, and support for entrepreneurship and businesses. Poverty among women, men and children negatively affects the country's economic growth. Thus, gender is intimately connected to poverty and needs to be an integral part of strategies for poverty reduction. According to the World Bank, "gender equality is smart economics".

PILLAR THREE –

National and personal security

Gender-based violence is rampant in Trinidad and Tobago and is linked to gang violence, rape, murder, kidnapping and other criminal activities. The national gender policy will seek to bring about an expanded, co-ordinated approach to gender-based violence including public awareness raising, training for the police and social service agencies, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the courts, and other mechanisms.

PILLAR FOUR –

Information and communications technologies, connecting Trinidad and Tobago and building a new economy

Gender equity in access to the new information and communications technologies will help to narrow the gaps in educational achievements, and build a knowledge-based economy.

PILLAR FIVE –

A more diversified knowledge intensive economy, building on the native genius of our people

The national gender policy seeks to promote the equal development of all boys and girls, men and women in the society through high-quality, affordable education and training opportunities in a wide range of fields. Reforms in the education sector will address gender biases in the curriculum and set gender-sensitive goals for quality and efficiency. The national gender policy is committed to redressing imbalances that affect the development of our human resources, and the social relations which result from such imbalances.

PILLAR SIX –

Good governance: People's participation

The primary aim of this pillar is to create a political culture of inclusion. Thus the national gender policy aims to reinforce democracy by securing equality of access, opportunity and participation for all citizens.

PILLAR SEVEN –

Foreign policy: Securing our place in the world

The international arena provides a critical space for Trinidad and Tobago to secure partnerships based on mutual interests that can help us achieve our national goals and objectives. We also gain the opportunity to be an influential voice in international decision-making processes – a true achievement for a country of less than two million citizens.

10. What are the key messages in the national gender policy on some priority issues?

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND HUMAN SECURITY

Gender-based violence emerges from the unequal power relations between women and men. It affects fundamental rights and freedoms and has long been an obstacle to national development.

Physical, psychological and sexual abuse inflicted on women and girls, and men and boys cuts across ethnicity, socio-economic status, age and other differences.

The pain, fear and insecurity caused by gender-based violence have high health, social and economic costs to the individual, family, workplace and society.

The national gender policy aims to develop and implement measures to prevent, address and alleviate gender-based violence, increasing women and men's understanding of their constitutional rights and responsibilities, and improving their means of redress.

MASCULINITY AND MANHOOD

Gender is often considered a 'women's issue', but it is really an issue for both women and men. Men have critical gender concerns that require attention and action. The national gender policy seeks to promote positive images and values of men and masculinity, and take active measures to address men's specific gender concerns in areas including family life, health, education and employment.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The national gender policy seeks to improve men's and women's access to appropriate, affordable and high-quality health care, information and related services throughout their life cycle, helping them to live enhanced personal, social and productive lives. It aims to offer improved sexual and reproductive health services, and to complement national strategies on HIV/AIDS.



EDUCATION AND LITERACY

The aim of education is to develop the full potential of an individual regardless of his or her sex, ethnicity, class, creed, location or (dis)ability. The population is the society's most valuable resource, and its capacity to compete globally depends on how well it educates and trains its population, both young and old.

The main priority of the policy with regard to education is to promote gender equality in education and training through equitable access to lifelong learning and the use of gender-sensitive materials and approaches. This will help men and women, boys and girls attain their fullest potential.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The national gender policy aims to improve the skills of women and men living in poverty, to enable them to enjoy an improved quality of life and to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion.

LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

The national gender policy recognizes the critical role of government in protecting the rights of workers, providing social protection, and laying down equitable policy frameworks for entrepreneurial and business development.

UNWAGED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, DOMESTIC AND FAMILY LIFE

The national gender policy will promote the recognition of unwaged and reproductive work, unpaid labour and domestic and family life arrangements, because of their immense contribution to social wellbeing and national development, and to ensure that increased resources are allocated to this sector.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

The national gender policy recognizes Trinidad and Tobago's need to increase food security, pursue rural development, and practice environmentally-sensitive physical and industrial development. Sustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women's and men's contributions to environmental protection, preservation and management are recognized and supported. The policy therefore seeks to ensure the wellbeing of women and men by integrating gender-equality goals into strategies aimed at increasing food security and improving the ways in which we use our natural resources.

MACRO-ECONOMY AND TRADE

The process of development is multi-faceted and has economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of which gender is a fundamental factor.

The national gender policy seeks to promote the equitable, sustainable socio-economic development of men and women. It will forge links between economic policy and planning to transform the goals of macro-economic policies to include social justice and equity.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Transparent and accountable governance depend on equal participation by men and women. The policy will promote equality between men and women in power-sharing and decision-making at all levels. It will provide a framework for active, visible measures to significantly increase the number of women in decision-making and to utilize their talents as political leaders, parliamentarians, diplomats, members of boards, local councillors, etc.

11. What are some of the government's international commitments to gender equality and equity?

The Government has a responsibility to affirm the equal rights of women and men that are enshrined in:

- The Charter of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (signed on January 12, 1990)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR] (signed on December 8, 1978)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] (signed on December 21, 1978)

12. Which Caribbean countries and territories have national gender policies and action plans?

- Bahamas
- Belize
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Dominica
- Guyana
- Jamaica
- St. Kitts and Nevis
- Turks and Caicos Islands



Trinidad and Tobago does not have a national gender policy. However, it is important to note that the research, analysis and framework of the Trinidad and Tobago draft national gender policy have informed the policies of the British Virgin Islands and Dominica.

The Ministry believes that a National Gender Policy is critical in order to set out the Government's gender equality priorities across the social, economic and political spheres; build coherence among all stakeholders including government, the private sector, labour and civil society for the implementation of the Policy; and secure the necessary resources to address the critical gender issues facing the nation.

The Ministry recognizes further that the adoption of the National Gender Policy requires a renewal of commitment by all stakeholders to full equality between men and women in the society.

